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The world is at a perilous moment. I will refer to the Middle East situation, before turning to the overseas territories, and conclude with a thought regarding China.

The situation in the Levant is so distressing. Everyone knows the ramifications, not only for the conflicting sides, but for the world. Resolution drifts, either willingly by skilled defenders of one side or another, or unwillingly by their collocutors. Is either side ready to discuss life in the region, or do they want to continue to prove themselves right and to die for it?

Claims on the rights to the land and who was there first—with control or containment of the settlers—is a quandary as complex as the horrific events of 7 October. Debating circular claims on the cluster of problems with the many participants who are physically in combat, or actively driving it from behind, is not going to lead to any sustainable solution. The only question is whether the sides can face reality and discuss the present and future, while putting aside grievances from the past.

Can a wedge be inserted between Iran and active players in the region, or will we continue to allow skilled puppet masters to continue unabated? A peace treaty will be signed one day; there is no choice. We—all those with a vested interest in a resolution—must not stay on the sidelines. However, we must not take sides, but instead push the sides to face reality and negotiate on its terms.

I turn now to the overseas territories and shall take Gibraltar as an example. Gibraltar has assessed broadening its trade links, and it wishes to do this with the same rights and privileges as the United Kingdom. It sees potential in increasing trade with Africa. However, to maximise its potential, a level playing field with respect to the UK is needed to allow the repositioning of its economy to a post-Brexit model and the maximising of advances in new technology such as artificial intelligence. Article 12 of the UK-Sierra Leone bilateral FTA is clear, however, that the Government “may” consider extending the same rights and privileges to an overseas territory. Why would government in London not agree? First and foremost, we must surely be looking after our nearest and dearest.

However, a recent official note from the FCDO made the Government’s position clear: “It is not the policy of the UK Government to extend bilateral investment treaty agreements to British Overseas Territories, even though that provision is in all of them, because the UK has found that the BIT treaties are not made much use of”. I am confused as to what is meant by that—the horse or the cart syndrome. I would be delighted to give a copy of the note with those remarks in it from a department of the FCDO. If I may say so, I believe that approach to be wide of the mark in today’s world, and it smacks of yesteryear’s colonial approach to policy. We should be encouraging innovation in our post-Brexit world, and as much to our overseas territories as elsewhere. Would the Secretary of State look at this with a view to reconsideration?

I conclude with a remark as regards China. Too much of an open door is being given to China to build on a range of strategic alliances. Beyond, notably, Africa, inroads are being made into the Pacific. I hope the upcoming CHOGM in Samoa will emphasise the unity and importance that we and the Commonwealth place on our Pacific Rim relations.

That said, and while it is imperative that we diversify supply chains—with India being an obvious beneficiary —and be proactive regarding the changing maritime landscape, I believe

that we should not be dismissive of the relationship with China, and should be exploring ways for, not thwarting, mutual bilateral co-operation, building on our respective strengths and contribution, and recognising the importance, together with all the complexities. Dialogue and engagement are always preferable. It is not as though we, the West, do not hold a trump card by providing a large percentage of their marketplace.

However, going back to an earlier remark on sea routes, too much overreliance is being given to the vagaries of international law, for example to the potential for future civil and defence long-term challenges in the Northern Arctic Sea route. We—those who share common ideals—must become more assertive as the world is headed towards an extended cold war.